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ABSTRACT

A foster parent recruitment strategy was developed and implemented to increase the pool of potential foster parents in a treatment foster care program serving troubled children between 2 and 18 years in a south Florida community. Foster parents in this program were expected to implement a specific skill acquisition program for each child and maintain records of the child's progress. The problem in recruiting foster parents was documented through interviews and a literature review. The recruitment strategy involved a variety of techniques, including fliers, announcements in community bulletins, inserts in utility bills or paycheck envelopes, a finders' fee for current foster parents if they referred others, billboards, television public service announcements and press releases, and filling the position of Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter. Evaluation results indicated that the number of inquiry calls from people interested in foster parenting increased an average of 400 percent over the 3-month data collection period. The number of contacts with recruitment resources increased over 1,000 percent. The number of referrals from current foster parents did not increase. The most effective recruitment methods were utility bill inserts, articles in community newspapers, and social service professionals. The least effective methods were brochures and posters. (Seven appendices contain examples of fliers, billboards, utility bill inserts, and press releases. Contains 26 references.) (Author/KB)

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# Development and Implementation of a Foster Parent Recruitment Strategy in a Treatment Foster Care Program

by

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Cohort 2F

A Practicum Report Presented to the Master's Programs in Life Span Care and Administration in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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1997

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## Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

3/26/97 — Date

Carol Ronacher — Signature of Student

**Abstract**

Development and Implementation of a Foster Parent Recruitment Strategy in a Treatment Foster Care Program. Ronacher, Carol., 1997: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Master's Program in Life Span Care and Administration. Descriptors: Foster Care/Foster Children/Treatment Foster Care/Therapeutic Foster Care/Recruiting Foster Parents.

Growing urban poverty, parental drug abuse, and increasing reports of child abuse and neglect are causing children to pour into the foster care system at an alarming rate. At the same time, societal changes such as increased mobility and the growth of two-income families make it harder for families to commit to foster parenting. The demand for foster parents far exceeds the supply. In addition, many foster care agencies are faced with large caseload demands that make it hard to devote time to foster parent recruiting. Thus, recruitment of foster parents has been a problem in the foster care system for some time.

The author developed and implemented a foster parent recruitment strategy intended to increase the pool of potential foster parents in a treatment foster care agency. The strategy involved a variety of techniques that were drawn from a review of successful strategies used by other agencies.

After implementation of the recruitment strategy, the number of inquiry calls from people interested in foster parenting increased an average of 400% in a three month data collection period. The number of contacts with recruitment resources

increased over 1000%. It was expected that referrals from current foster parents would also increase; however, this objective was not met. Findings showed the most effective recruitment resources for this project to be utility bill inserts, articles in community newspapers, and social service professionals.

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## Chapter I. Introduction and Background

### The Setting in which the Problem Occurs

The targeted treatment foster care agency is part of a larger social service agency based in the Midwest. The agency began as an orphanage, and grew from this setting into residential group homes for troubled children. In response to the growing need for quality services for children and families at risk, the agency expanded it's programs. Agency sites throughout the country offer a variety of services, including: a national training center, residential group homes, parent training, shelter care, family preservation services, a national research hospital, a crisis hotline, and treatment foster care. The setting for this project is one of eleven treatment foster care programs affiliated with this agency. The site is located in South Florida.

The South Florida community where this program operates is experiencing a steady population growth. "1.8 million newcomers are expected in South Florida over the next twenty years" (Engelhardt, 1996, p. 1B). The population growth is partly due to increased immigration, especially among Hispanic and Haitian immigrants. The cultural diversity of the county's population is readily evident. The 1990 Census revealed that "more than twenty-five different languages are spoken in county homes by approximately 15% of its population" (Census, 1990 as cited in Children's Services Council, 1996). It is expected that the targeted treatment foster care program will parallel this rise in immigration and show an increase in foster children coming from

these cultures. The ethnic identification of the foster parents and foster children in the program is presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Ethnic Identification of Foster Parents and Foster Children

| | Caucasian | Hispanic | Black |
|---|---|---|---|
| foster parents | 27% | 27% | 46% |
| foster children | 55% | 9% | 36% |

The treatment foster care program serves troubled children between the ages of two and eighteen years. Since the foster homes are "treatment" or "therapeutic" foster homes, the children accepted into the program have special needs stemming from abuse, neglect, troublesome home situations, or failed placements in traditional foster homes. At the targeted site, over half of the foster children have psychiatric diagnoses and receive mental health treatment; one quarter of the children are on psychotropic medications. The foster children have an average of three failed placements before entering the targeted program.

Several components of the treatment foster care program distinguish it from traditional foster care. These special components include:

* fifty hours of technical training for foster parents prior to the placement of a child in the home
* a minimum of eighteen hours of in-service training per year to foster parents after the placement of a child in the home
* once a week in-home consultation by a professional case

worker (known as a family consultant)
* 24-hour on-call support services for emergency or crisis situations
* occasional periods of relief from foster parenting via respite services
* significant stipends

In addition, the program has expectations of the foster parents that go beyond traditional foster care. Treatment foster parents are key members of the treatment team. The program views the foster parents as the most influential people to effect positive change in the children's lives. Because of this, they are not only expected to provide room, board, and supervision, but they are also expected to implement a specific skill acquisition program for each child and keep records of the child's progress. The fifty hour pre-placement training as well as the weekly consultations prepare the foster parents for the task of implementing the skill acquisition program. Foster parents must successfully complete this competency-based training before they will be accepted into the program. The training, which is based on the agency's treatment model, incorporates behavior modification and social learning theory. The foster parents are compensated for the extra responsibilities involved in providing "treatment" foster care. Their compensation is much larger than the pay in traditional foster care due to the increased expectations.

The targeted treatment foster care program is staffed by four key staff members: a program coordinator, two family consultants, and one administrative secretary. The ethnic makeup of the staff reflects the diverse cultural demographics of the community. The program coordinator is a Hispanic female; one consultant is a

Caucasian male; and all other staff members are Hispanic.

The program coordinator has a Master's of Social Work degree and is a licensed social worker in the state of Florida. She oversees all program operation, including direct supervision of the family consultants. Recruitment of foster parents is primarily her responsibility, although the family consultants are also expected to contribute to recruitment efforts.

The two family consultants each possess a Master's degree in a human service related field. One is new to the agency, but has extensive experience in working with children and families. The other family consultant has been with the agency for five years. She also has previous experience in Child Protective Services for the State of New York. Before working with foster families, they are required to successfully complete a three-week, competency based training at the main campus of this agency. The consultants have a maximum caseload of six families. The small caseload enables them to provide intense, individual attention to each foster family. Consultants are highly trained and experienced professionals who work along with the foster parents to design and review the skill acquisition plans, ensure that the program model is used correctly, and coordinate the child's treatment with other professionals involved.

**The Author's Role in the Setting**

The author is not directly involved in the targeted treatment foster care program, lending an unbiased and objective viewpoint to the subject. She has been involved with the family preservation program offered by the agency for five years. Many components of the family preservation program are similar to components of the treatment foster care program. Both programs practice the agency model which is based on social learning theory and behavior modification. Because the author understands the concepts of social learning theory and behavior modification, she understands how the agency utilizes these concepts in a variety of programs. The author's knowledge and experience with the agency's philosophy and treatment model has given her a basic understanding of every program affiliated with the agency. Agency personnel from the national office of the treatment foster care program, as well as the director and staff at the site, have given their full support to the author in carrying out the activities required for this practicum project.

## Chapter II. The Problem

### Problem Statement

The demand for foster parents far exceeds the supply. As a result, foster children are overcrowded into traditional foster homes. The more needy children who qualify for "treatment" foster care are placed on waiting lists until highly skilled "treatment" foster parents are recruited, trained, and licensed. Foster care staff at the targeted treatment foster care agency are plagued with an overwhelming workload which results in little time to devote to recruitment efforts. The lack of time available to recruit treatment foster parents prolongs the amount of time children must "wait" for an appropriate placement in a treatment foster home.

Treatment foster care agencies are challenged with finding foster parents for children who exhibit severe problematic behaviors. Treatment foster parenting is more difficult and requires more specialized skills than traditional foster parenting. Finding the people who have these special skills and high level of commitment is more difficult.

The lack of time available to devote to recruiting leads to delays in placing children into foster homes. The delay in placing children into foster homes is detrimental to their well-being and the well-being of society. The children who possess the special needs that make them appropriate for placement into "treatment" foster homes are at higher risk of developing anti-social, delinquent, and aggressive behaviors. Placement of these children into stable treatment foster homes can prevent these negative

behaviors from worsening. The learning experiences received while living in the foster home can help the children learn more positive behaviors necessary for them to become productive members of society. When placement into a treatment foster home is delayed due to low recruitment of foster parents, the probability is high that their negative behaviors will increase.

**Documentation of the Problem**

In order to document the problems associated with recruiting foster parents, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with agency personnel from the national office, targeted site, and affiliated sites throughout the country. Also interviewed were officials from the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the President of the Foster Family Based Treatment Association, the Director of a similar therapeutic foster care agency, as well as current and former foster parents. An extensive search of the literature dealing with foster care issues was also conducted.

The problem of recruiting foster parents is twofold. While there is an increase in the number of children needing foster homes, there is a decrease in the number of people willing or able to become foster parents (General Accounting Office, 1989; Morganthau, 1994; U.S. House, 1991). Children are pouring into the foster care system at an alarming rate. According to the American Public Welfare Association, "there were 442,000 foster children in 1992, up from around 280,000 in 1986" (as cited in Alderson, 1994,

p. 36). The demand for foster homes continues to increase, while the number of qualified foster parents has decreased by 30% since 1984 (U.S. House, 1991). The demand for foster homes far exceeds the supply. As a result, traditional foster homes are overcrowded. Also, long waiting lists have developed for children with special needs or problems which necessitate treatment foster care.

Of the eleven treatment foster care sites within the agency, two keep waiting lists. On average, ten children are on the waiting list at these sites. Instead of keeping a waiting list, the remaining sites do not accept referrals for children in need of treatment homes when homes are not available. At these sites, an average of six children per month are denied placement due to the lack of available treatment foster homes.

Administrators from the county DCF Department of Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health make referrals to the targeted treatment foster care program. Five children were waiting for placement into the targeted program at the start of this project. Many of these children must live in more restrictive settings such as group homes while awaiting placement into a "family" setting. Moorehouse and Sterry (1994) argue that "children who must be removed from their own families and placed in foster care need and deserve the most family-like placement setting possible" (p. 19). Some children remain in overcrowded traditional foster homes while waiting for an opening in a treatment foster home. These children are not receiving the "treatment" and supervision their special needs require.

According to a county DCF official, children often must be removed from their biological families immediately for their own safety (M. Griggs, personal communication, September 13, 1996). In these cases, waiting lists are not possible. If a waiting list is not possible and children must be placed in foster homes when the supply of homes is low, foster homes are overcrowded (Alderson, 1994). It is difficult for foster parents to adequately supervise the children in their foster home when the home is overcrowded. The lack of supervision increases the risk of revictimization of the children by the other children in the home. Fryer and Miyoshi (1993) claim "the record of departments of social services in protecting abused/neglected children from further mistreatment has been disappointing" (p. 1063). Children are often sexually and physically abused by other foster children in overcrowded foster homes. Unless the number of people willing to become foster parents increases, children will continue to be overcrowded into foster homes which decreases the quality of care and increases the risk of revictimization.

**Analysis of the Problem**

There are several factors which contribute to the increased need for foster homes: "growing urban poverty, abuse, homelessness, large numbers of teenage parents with inadequate family supports, and the AIDS/drug problem have forced more children from their families into foster care" (Cohen & Nehring, 1994; Insight, 1992; Kantrowitz, 1991; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess,

1982; Neuman, 1992; Smith & Gutheil, 1988). Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased due to mandated reporting (Kagan, 1995). Mandated reporting is a law requiring professionals who work with children to report any suspicions of child abuse and neglect to state authorities.

The reasons for the shortage of people willing or able to be foster parents are varied. Societal changes, such as higher divorce rates, two-breadwinner families, single parenting, and higher mobility have made it more difficult to commit to foster parenting (Smith & Gutheil, 1988). Secondly, the highly stressful and emotionally exhausting work of foster parenting is "considered poorly paid, low-status work with few other rewards" (Meyers, as cited in Smith & Gutheil, 1988, p. 138; Pires, 1992).

The stress level and potential for exhaustion is even higher in treatment foster homes where the children's behaviors can be more problematic. According to the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, Florida (1996), "One of the major barriers to successful therapeutic foster care programs is the difficultly in recruiting foster parents who are willing and able to meet the demands of therapeutic foster care" (p. 39). The director of another therapeutic foster care agency in the county says, "We have more stringent criteria for our foster parents. We expect a lot more from them because our children need more. It takes a special foster parent to work with these challenging children, and it is difficult to find those who have the special skills to do this work." She went on to say, "many of these skills come naturally,

and cannot be taught" (K. Thomas, personal communication, November 1, 1996). Recruiting people for treatment foster homes is even more challenging because of the special skills necessary for the job.

Retention of quality foster parents has also posed a dilemma to the foster care system due to the high stress, low-status, and poor pay (Morganthau, 1994). Recruitment efforts to increase foster homes are useless if those foster homes drop out of the program. There is tremendous turnover of foster parents, with about 60% "dropping out" each year (Neuman, 1992).

In addition to recruitment difficulties, other factors influence delaying placement of children into foster homes. Many of the program coordinators at the agency's sites noted difficulty in finding foster parents who will accept pre-teen and teenage children. The average age of foster children at the target site is ten years. Because of foster parent selectiveness, children may not be placed into homes, even when homes are available. Some program coordinators expressed difficulty in finding an appropriate "match" between foster parents and foster child. An appropriate match occurs when both the foster parents and the foster child agree to the placement before the child is placed in the foster home. Many times, it is the foster parents who disagree with the placement. Again, the selectiveness of the foster parents prevent many children from being placed into foster homes. A larger pool of foster parents would make finding appropriate "matches" more likely to occur.

Administrators at the agency's national office feel that some of the delay in placing children into foster homes is due to strict licensing requirements and the associated paperwork (M. Mott and S. Taylor, personal communication, August 26, 1996). All foster parents must be licensed by the state before children can be placed into their home. This licensing is important as it involves background checks which help to eliminate those people unfit to foster parent for reasons such as criminal records. However, the length of time required for licensure to become final can be long, ranging from one to twelve months for both traditional and treatment foster care (Cohen & Nehring, 1994). Much of the licensing paperwork is redundant. Some licensing requirements, such as background checks, may not be completed in a timely manner. Agency personnel have no control over the completion of background checks as it is usually completed by state officials. In addition, the licensing process may be so punishing that potential foster parents decide not to make the commitment to avoid the aggravation (Friedman, et al., 1980; Smith & Gutheil, 1988). Delays in finalizing licensure leads to delays in placing children into foster homes.

Funding sources, such as Medicaid, also require that program staff and foster parents complete additional paperwork. Many agencies are funded by several sources, and must complete different paperwork for each funding source. Funding for the program is contingent upon completing this paperwork. When staff and foster parents are forced to complete massive amounts of paperwork, the

time spent working directly with children is limited; thus, reducing the ability to supervise and monitor the children. The large amounts of paperwork may also be discouraging to new recruits. Funding agencies must work with programs to meet the needs of the foster families rather than meeting the needs of bureaucratic structures (Farrow, 1991).

Factors which may contribute to the recruitment problem include lack of time to devote to recruitment activities and funding cuts. Rosenau (1990) states, "many agencies make recruitment a part-time function of staff who already carry a caseload or have multiple other assignments" (p. 22). Case studies describing successful recruitment outcomes involved agencies which employed full-time recruiters with sole responsibility of increasing the number of qualified foster parents (James, 1979; and Rosenau, 1990). In this agency, as well as many other social service agencies, there is no foster parent recruiter position. Foster care caseworkers have many other duties in addition to recruiting. As a result, recruitment receives less attention as caseload demands take priority when the two tasks are combined into one position (Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1990). It is also a "disincentive to add new people to the program, as it may have a direct bearing on the future work load" (Rosenau, 1990, p. 22).

Funding cuts in social services make it even more difficult to hire staff with the sole responsibility of recruiting foster parents. To avoid the cost of hiring additional staff, current staff are given larger caseloads and increased responsibilities,

which decreases their productivity and quality of work. The increased responsibility of recruitment often overwhelms foster care staff who have many other caseload demands in addition to recruitment. As a result, recruitment responsibilities are neglected.

In summary, children are pouring into foster care at a time when there is a shortage of foster homes. As a result, children are delayed or denied "family" living environments when foster homes are not available. When state agencies in traditional foster care cannot wait for an available foster home, they are forced to overcrowd current foster homes. Foster parent selectiveness regarding the children who are placed into their homes adds to the problem. Pre-teen and teenage children are the most difficult to place, while they tend to be the most in need. Children who meet the requirements for "treatment" foster care tend to be older children with behavior problems, as a result, they are hard to place. Furthermore, licensing requirements and funding sources demand the completion of redundant paperwork which delays placement of children into homes and reduces the quality of care. The targeted site, as well as many other agencies, are plagued with few staff members carrying large caseload demands which take priority over recruitment responsibilities. If more people will commit to foster parenting and recruitment given priority, many of the problems mentioned above will be rectified.

## Chapter III. Goals and Objectives

The problems associated with the shortage of foster homes is evident. The goal of this practicum project was to increase the pool of potential foster parents in a treatment foster care program, thus, addressing the problematic shortage of foster homes. The following three objectives were developed in order to accomplish this goal. The goal and objectives of this practicum project were expected to be met in a ten week implementation period.

Objective 1) It was expected that the number of inquiry calls from people showing interest in foster parenting would increase by at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

Objective 2) It was expected that the number of contacts in the community to aid in "spreading the word" regarding the need for foster parents would increase by at least 500% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

Objective 3) It was expected that the number of referrals of potential foster parents made by active foster parents would increase by at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

## Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

### Review of Existing Programs, Models, and Approaches

A combination of methods to increase recruitment of foster parents has been proven more effective than single focused approaches (Cohen & Nehring, 1994; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Rosenau, 1990; Siegal & Roberts, 1989; Smith & Gutheil, 1988). Moore (1988) and her colleagues describe a variety of recruitment techniques used by the Community Services Department in Hennipin County, Minnesota. The techniques utilized at Hennipin County included classified advertisements, television, radio, billboards, foster parents, community newspapers, brochures, bookmarks, flyers, posters, and church bulletins. Thirty seven percent of all the applicants at Hennipin County mentioned more than one recruitment source, which suggests utilizing a variety of methods. Siegel and Roberts (1989), in their effort to increase recruitment of foster parents in Washington's King County, concluded "multiple methods of enlistment have a synergistic effect" (p. 553).

Another important aspect of recruitment discussed in the literature involves targeting recruitment strategies to the types of homes needed. The General Accounting Office (1989) reports that, "recruiting strategies aimed at getting the types of foster homes needed are more efficient than broad, general approaches that do not" (p. 26). It is difficult for foster children to adjust to new schools, new parents, and new neighborhoods. Keeping the children in a family that shares the same ethnic and cultural

identity lessens the degree of adjustment the child has to make, thus, lessening their stress. A needs assessment would determine the type of ethnic minority foster homes needed in order to place foster children in homes matching their ethnic and cultural identity.

Michigan's foster parent recruiting program targeted a specific need for black foster parents. The General Accounting Office study (1989) described Michigan's efforts to fill a need for black foster homes by developing "a unique partnership and an annual contract with One Church, One Child of Michigan, Inc., to recruit black foster homes" (p. 48). Recruitment efforts must be customized to reach the types of foster homes needed by the program.

Sources in the literature suggest recruitment efforts must begin with community education to mobilize the community into taking action (General Accounting Office, 1989; James, 1979; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Pires, 1992; Rosenau, 1990). Moorehouse and Sterry (1994) claim "an aware and informed public is critical in soliciting a community response to what is essentially a community problem" (p. 20). A variety of approaches and strategies have been employed to educate the community regarding the need for foster homes. Examples of such approaches include: community presentations, announcements in community publications, a wide distribution of flyers or leaflets, advertising, and media exposure.

Specific themes in community education campaigns have proven effective in recruiting foster parents who will stay with the program long term. For example, several sources suggest the campaign present a positive but realistic message about what the job of foster parenting entails (General Accounting Office, 1989; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994). A realistic message about treatment foster parenting would include the realities of parenting children with severe behavior problems. The key is to balance the many rewards of foster parenting with the many challenges and difficulties (Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994). According to Moorehouse and Sterry (1994), "foster parents who are prepared for both the 'best of times' and the 'worst of times' are foster parents prepared for a more satisfying venture" (p. 23).

Recruitment campaigns must present a theme that emphasizes the job of foster parenting rather than the children needing care (General Accounting Office, 1989; Jorgenson, 1996; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Valluzzo, 1989). When campaigns focus on the children, they appeal to foster parents who want to "rescue" the children. "Rescuers" are less likely to be motivated to encourage permanency planning. Permanency planning is the system's effort to ensure children have stability in their family life. It involves moving foster children toward permanent placements through reunification with natural families or placement into adoptive homes. "Rescuers" tend to have problems with letting children move on to more permanent placements. Recruitment campaigns that sell the job of foster parenting, rather than selling the children are

more likely to attract foster parents whose interests are more compatible with permanency planning.

Sources in the literature as well as the foster care professionals interviewed agree that recruitment efforts must be continuous (Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moore, Grandpre & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; M. Mott, personal communication, August 26, 1996; Smith & Gutheil, 1988). Moorehouse and Sterry (1994) stress that, "recruitment should not be seen as a project or a campaign, but as a long-term commitment and ongoing endeavor undertaken by an agency" (p. 23).

Programs that have been successful in maintaining a long-term recruitment process are those who separated caseload and recruitment responsibilities by developing a full-time recruiter position (General Accounting Office, 1989; Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Rosenau, 1990). The Macomb-Oakland Regional Center in Mt. Clemens, Michigan has developed over 375 foster homes. Many staff members at the Center have the sole responsibility of recruiting potential foster parents (Rosenau, 1990). Because recruitment for treatment foster care is even more difficult, Stroul and Friedman (1994) recommend "a full-time recruiter as well as a clinical staff member for every eight to ten children" (as cited in Children's Services Council, 1996, p. 39). Employing full-time foster parent recruiters ensure the recruitment process is continuous.

There is much evidence in the literature which confirms that active foster parents are the most viable recruitment source (General Accounting Office, 1989; Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Smith & Gutheil, 1988; Valluzzo, 1985). When the recruitment theme is positive yet realistic, active foster parents are the best people to portray these realities. According to the General Accounting Office (1989), "foster parents recruited by other foster parents are more likely to stay in foster care because their expectations are more realistic" (p. 24). Career oriented foster parents who view their foster parenting role as a professional role are also more likely to recruit (Valluzzo, 1984). Great effort must be made to keep active foster parents satisfied because they can be valuable advocates of the program. Some programs offer incentives to foster parents for recruiting new foster parents. For example, the state of Michigan pays $100 to any foster parent who recruits a new foster parent couple into the state's foster care program (General Accounting Office, 1989). Recruitment efforts which involve active foster parents are more likely to be effective than efforts which do not.

**Description of Solution Strategy**

The strategy employed to recruit foster parents utilized a combination of techniques (Calendar of planned implementation activities is provided in Appendix A). A needs assessment, based on a review of census data, predicted a growth of the minority

population in the county (Children's Services Council, 1996). The recruitment strategy was partly customized to target minority populations to prepare for the predicted rise in minority foster children. Based on the success of Michigan's partnership with One Church, One Child of Michigan, Inc. to recruit Black foster children, attempts were made to form similar contacts with church leaders of minority congregations (General Accounting Office, 1989). Sources in the literature suggest targeting the specific needs of the program, and efforts to recruit from minority populations targeted an expected need for minority foster parents (General Accounting Office, 1989).

A variety of methods were used to educate the community about the need for foster parents. The author made telephone calls and wrote letters to schedule presentations on foster parenting. The presentation made a plea for all audience members to do something to address the problem by either becoming a foster parent or aiding in recruitment by spreading the word.

A presentation outline was prepared by the author. Based on information from the literature search, the content of the presentation focused on the role of foster parenting rather than the children (General Accounting Office, 1989; Jorgenson, 1996; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982). By focusing on the job of foster parenting, it was hoped that individuals who would be comfortable with permanency planning would become interested in foster parenting.

An active and experienced foster parent acted as co-presenter. Their participation in recruiting was prompted by information confirming the effectiveness of foster parents as recruiters because "they are accepted as having earned the authority to speak about and to influence others in taking up the foster parent role" (Valluzzo, 1984, p. 95). With the foster parent present, a realistic portrayal of foster parenting was presented (General Accounting Office, 1989; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994). The foster parent gave a brief description about their experience with foster parenting and answered questions from the audience.

It was hoped that the foster parent's experience with presenting would enhance their view of foster parenting as a professional role. According to Valluzzo (1984), foster parents who view their role as professional are more likely to be effective recruiters.

Flyers and leaflets describing the program and calling for people to consider foster parenting were distributed by the author to many locations throughout the community such as libraries, churches, local businesses, and bookstores. Active foster parents were provided with flyers and asked to help in distributing them throughout the community as well. Some of the flyers and leaflets printed by the agency were not used because they appeared to "sell the children." New flyers were created which focused on the role of foster parenting to attract new foster parents who would be

compatible with permanency planning (see Appendix B for an example of the flyer used).

The author contacted area billboard advertisers to request the donation of billboard space for recruitment purposes. A billboard was designed in the most economical manner possible. For example, no pictures were used in the design because of the increased cost in printing. A very basic design, in black and white, was utilized (see Appendix C for billboard design).

Letters and telephone calls were made to attract the media to the dilemma of foster parent recruitment. It was hoped that increased media exposure would result in increased community knowledge of the program and the need for foster parents. Communications with the media focused on requests for articles, interviews, and public service announcements (PSA's).

Editors of various community publications were contacted via letters and telephone calls to request announcements be placed in their publications. Community publications included church bulletins, corporate employee newsletters, community newsletters, and teacher newsletters. A specific effort was made to target church bulletins. Although the agency is non-sectarian, the agency's philosophy includes the belief that religion can be a very healing force to children who have suffered. For this reason, church going individuals were specifically targeted to become foster parents. The agency strives to match foster children with foster parents who share the religious affiliation of the child's family of origin.

Local utility companies were contacted by phone regarding the possibility of including inserts in utility bills. Payroll departments of local businesses and city offices were also contacted and requested to include inserts in employee paycheck envelopes. The inserts were designed with the theme "Thought About It Long Enough? (see Appendix D for example of insert). The theme was based on data confirming that most foster parents think about fostering for at least a year before deciding to make an inquiry (Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982).

Information gained in the literature search supports making the recruitment effort a continuous one (Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Smith & Gutheil, 1988). In order to ensure that recruitment efforts were continuous, a Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter position was developed. Two local volunteer agencies were contacted regarding this available position to aid in filling the position. The author also attended a volunteer fair hosted by a local university to recruit an individual to fill this volunteer position. Active foster parents were also notified regarding the volunteer position.

The literature shows evidence that foster parents make the best recruiters; therefore, efforts were made to encourage active foster parents to make referrals (General Accounting Office, 1989; Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988; Moorehouse & Sterry, 1994; Smith & Gutheil, 1988; Valluzzo, 1985). As already mentioned, an active

foster parent was invited to co-present at a presentation about foster parenting held in the community. It was hoped that foster parent experience in lecturing would serve to increase the professionalism of the foster parenting role.

Another strategy employed to increase professionalism of the foster parenting role included the agency paying the membership dues for it's foster parents to the local foster parent association. An announcement was printed in the agency newsletter informing active foster parents of this new benefit. Efforts to increase professionalism of the foster parenting role were prompted by information suggesting that those foster parents who view their foster parenting role as a professional one would become more effective recruiters of new foster parents. By increasing the professionalism of the foster parenting role, it was hoped that foster parents would increase their recruitment efforts.

Smith and Gutheil (1988), in their effort to recruit foster parents for the Salvation Army Social Services for Children, offered a $100 bonus to any foster parent or staff for recruiting a new foster family. The targeted agency already had a policy in place offering a monetary incentive to foster parents when they recruit new people. The foster parents are awarded $50 when the referred individuals successfully complete the pre-placement training, and they are awarded another $50 when the referred individuals complete six months of service. Active foster parents were reminded frequently of the "finders fee."

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The following information was printed in the agency newsletter to encourage foster parents to actively recruit, and to show recognition to the foster parents who made referrals:

* a reminder of the bonus or "finders fee" offered by the agency to foster parents who bring new recruits into the program.
* a "thank you" to those foster parents who have made referrals. Their names and the number of referrals they made were listed to give recognition.
* an announcement that the agency will pay the dues for foster parents wishing to join the local foster parent association.

**Evaluation of Objectives**

To track and measure the success of meeting the objectives, all progress was documented in the program recruitment manual. The content of every phone call, letter, and response regarding recruitment purposes were filed in the manual for future reference.

> Objective One: It was expected that the number of inquiry calls from people showing interest in foster parenting would increase at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

One section of the recruitment manual included contact sheets completed when telephone inquiries were made by people interested in becoming foster parents (see Appendix E: Inquiry Contact Sheet). Contact sheets completed before and after implementing the strategy were compared to determine the percent of increase in inquiry calls. This measured whether Objective One was achieved.

Objective Two: It was expected that the number of contacts in the community to aid in "spreading the word" regarding the need for foster parents would increase by at least 500% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

Another section of the recruitment manual included Community Contact Sheets documenting attempts made to gain community support in recruiting foster parents. (see Appendix F: Community Contact Sheet). The content of every phone call or personal contact with community members was recorded on the community contact sheets and filed in the recruitment manual. If the contact resulted in some action to aid in recruitment, such as distributing flyers or organizing presentations, the contact was considered a new community contact. Previous recruitment notes indicated that at the start of this project, the program had three community contacts used for recruitment purposes. It was expected that the number of community contacts would increase from three to at least fifteen. The number of community contacts before and after implementing the strategy were compared to measure the achievement of Objective Two.

Objective Three: It was expected that the number of referrals of potential foster parents made by active foster parents would increase by at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

The Inquiry Contact Sheets record the source of the referral. When the inquiry was the result of a referral from an active foster parent, the information was recorded on the Inquiry Contact Sheet. Analysis of Inquiry Contacts Sheets before and after implementing the strategy measured the achievement of Objective Three.

Progress with recruitment efforts was recorded in the recruitment manual. All documentation recorded in the manual was reviewed once a week to ensure that all recruitment activities were accurately recorded. When unexpected obstacles surfaced, they were addressed at that time.

## Chapter V. Strategy Employed - Action Taken and Results

The strategy employed to meet the goals and objectives of this project included using a variety of methods to spread the word regarding the program's need for treatment foster parents. The recruitment methods consisted of the following activities: community presentations, a wide distribution of flyers, billboard advertising, media exposure, community publication and church bulletin announcements, utility bill inserts, employee paycheck envelope inserts, development of a volunteer recruiter position, and announcements in the agency newsletter to encourage active foster parents involvement in recruitment.

### Action Taken

There was some difficulty in scheduling presentations on foster parenting. However, one presentation was made to a Parent Teacher Association at a local middle school. The group consisted of approximately thirty individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. An experienced foster parent acted as co-presenter. The foster parent presenter did an excellent job describing her experience and answering questions form the group. The presentation was well received. Although no one in attendance expressed interest in foster parenting, everyone present showed sincere interest in helping to "spread the word" regarding the need for foster parents. Attendees were asked to take a handful of flyers each and distribute them throughout the community.

Flyers and leaflets were made available in 18 locations throughout the community such as churches, bookstores, and libraries. The author personally visited many of the locations to request permission to leave flyers. To save time, however, most of the flyers were sent by mail to the locations after approval was attained over the phone.

Efforts to attain donated billboard space were successful. A local billboard advertiser offers a special plan to non-profit agencies. The company offered to donate the monthly rental fee of $700; however, the targeted foster care agency was responsible for labor and printing costs (approximately $300). The company offered ten billboards to the agency. Even with the donated rental fee, there was still significant costs for printing and labor. Therefore, only one billboard was used for the project. If the billboard proved to be an effective recruitment tool, more billboards would be used by the agency in the future. The location of the billboard was a busy intersection in an urban part of the county. The posting of the billboard was delayed two weeks due to the advertiser misplacing the poster; however, the company agreed to leave the billboard up for longer due to the delay. Two weeks after the billboard was posted, it began to rip. The company was requested to repair the billboard, but rain and poor weather delayed the repair. The billboard was not repaired by the time implementation activities ceased. These events may have resulted in a lower number of inquiry calls from this source than would have been received in absence of these problems.

Efforts to gain media exposure for the project were the most involved and time consuming. Many media editors did not consider the lack of foster parents as "news" and were not interested in pursuing a story. The editors showed more interest in success stories about specific children. Some media editors requested a press release detailing information for possible articles. The author researched writing press releases and received guidance from the agency's public relations department. Line's (1979) News Writing for Non-Professionals was a helpful resource in preparing press releases (see Appendix G for a sample press release). This work resulted in valuable experience in writing press releases and dealing with the media. Additionally, many positive contacts were made, and the author developed a list of local media people to contact when the agency has news to share with the community.

Specific actions taken to gain media exposure are as follows. One local television station scheduled a feature story depicting a foster family who recently adopted their foster children. Unfortunately, the taping was cancelled and was never rescheduled.

Another television station designed and aired a 20 second PSA urging those interested in foster parenting to call the agency. The PSA was based on a press release written by the author. The PSA aired several times a day for one week.

Another television station agreed to air a PSA if the agency already had one produced, but they would not be able to do both the production of the PSA and air it. Since the agency did not have a PSA on foster parenting available, this television station was

unable to do a PSA. They did, however, include the recruitment campaign on their "community calendar" which was announced on the evening news.

The local cable station offers "The Community Channel" which prints on screen announcements of interest to the community while background music plays. The author wrote a letter to the producer of this program requesting that an announcement regarding becoming a treatment foster parent be included on their programming. Several weeks after writing this letter, the announcement had not appeared on the station and the author called the producer. The producer stated that the announcement should air two weeks after they receive the request. He requested another copy of the letter. The announcement was never aired on the "Community Channel" during the implementation period.

A letter followed by telephone calls resulted in a thirty minute interview on a local radio talk show. The show was designed to honor individuals who make a difference in the lives of children. The interview was very positive and the agency phone number was announced several times. The interview served to educate the community regarding the need for foster parents.

The county where the targeted site is located is covered by one major newspaper. A telephone call with the editor resulted in a request for a press release. A press release was sent to the paper and an article appeared three months later. In addition, letters to smaller neighborhood newspapers resulted in articles appearing in three different community newspapers.

The author attended a community function to recruit foster parents or a volunteer recruiter. The function served as a community forum to collaborate on meeting the needs of the children in the county. One local newspaper reporter interviewed the author at this function. The reporter quoted the author in her article. The quote read, "the number of people willing to commit to foster parenting is decreasing, when the need continues to increase" (Miller, 1996, p. A3). The article discussed the rising challenge of meeting the needs of children during a growth of the county's teenage population.

Several new community contacts emerged from efforts to have announcements printed in community publications such as business newsletters and church bulletins. A total of 14 announcements were printed in various community publications. The majority of announcements appeared in church bulletins. Although some churches would not help due to a large amount of similar requests, most were very cooperative. Hundreds of churches exist in the county where this project was administered, and only a small percentage of them were contacted due to time limitations.

A successful contact was made with a church consisting of an ethnic minority congregation. The church, with primarily Black parishioners, placed an announcement in their bulletin and distributed flyers after church services.

Several city and county utility companies were contacted by telephone and asked to include inserts in their utility bills. Most of the utility companies used postcards and were unable to

include inserts in mailings. However, one city did agree to include inserts in their mailings and even agreed to pay for the printing costs as a donation to the agency. The inserts went out to 30,000 customers with their water bills.

The author contacted several city payroll departments by telephone to request they include inserts in their employee paycheck envelopes. Two cities agreed and included inserts in their paycheck envelopes which were distributed to a total of 1,080 employees. Some local businesses with a large number of employees were asked to include inserts in paychecks envelopes, but none complied. The author also contacted banks in the community to request they include inserts with customer statements. These requests were denied.

Efforts to fill the Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter position included letters written to two volunteer placement organizations in the community. The author also attended a volunteer fair at a local university. The volunteer placement organizations were unable to fill the position. One person, who had heard about the position from the Volunteer Fair at the local university, contacted the agency. However, it turned out that this individual was pursuing a paid position. Efforts to fill the volunteer position were to no avail.

Announcements were printed in the agency newsletter to encourage active foster parents to make referrals. Efforts to increase their foster parent professionalism included lecturing and paying their dues to the local foster parent association. Data

gathered midcourse in implementation showed foster parents referrals to be below criteria. Because of this, a decision was made to personally address active foster parents to encourage them take an active role in recruiting new people. The author spoke to the active foster parents as they gathered at the agency for an in-service training. Immediately after this encounter, one foster parent approached the author with a possible recruitment resource in her church.

The calendar plan for implementation indicated the use of paid advertising in the local newspaper. The agency site director decided not to use the paid advertising and his decision was based on two factors. First, the cost of the newspaper advertising was considered too high ($700 a day for a quarter page). Secondly, past experience with using newspaper advertising for recruiting showed poor results at the targeted site. No paid newspaper advertising was used in this recruitment campaign.

**Results**

The goal of increasing the pool of potential foster parents was met as the inquiry calls received represented potential foster parents. After implementation, the number of inquiry calls increased by an average of 400 percent in a three month data collection period. Table 2 indicates the percentage of inquiry calls received from each recruitment source in the three month data collection period.

Table 2

Percentage of Inquiry Calls Received from Each Recruitment Source

| Recruitment Source | Number of inquiry calls | Percentage of inquiry calls |
|---|---|---|
| Presentation | 0 | 0 |
| Flyers/Leaflets | 0 | 0 |
| Billboard | 1 | 3 |
| Major newspaper article | 2 | 7 |
| Community newspaper | 7 | 23 |
| Newsletter | 1 | 3 |
| Public Service Announcement | 1 | 3 |
| Radio interview | 0 | 0 |
| Community publications | 2 | 7 |
| Utility bill insert | 7 | 23 |
| Paycheck envelope insert | 1 | 3 |
| Foster Parent Referral | 1 | 3 |
| Social Service Professionals | 4 | 13 |
| Word of mouth | 2 | 7 |
| Unknown | 1 | 3 |

Table 2 shows the most effective recruitment sources to be the utility bill inserts, the community newspaper articles, and social service professionals. The mass distribution of flyers was of little benefit to recruitment. In this project, one recruitment resource did not stand out above the others. Calls were received from a variety of recruitment sources; indicating the effectiveness of using a variety of techniques.

Results show that two of the three objectives were met.

Objective 1) It was expected that the number of inquiry calls from people showing interest in foster parenting would increase by at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

Previous program data indicates an average of two inquiry calls per month were received by the agency in 1995. In the first month of data collection, a total of nine inquiry calls were received; representing an increase of 350%. In the second month, seven inquiry calls were received, an increase of 250%. In the third month, 14 inquiry calls were received, an increase of 600%. Therefore, objective one to increase inquiry calls by at least 100% was met.

Objective 2) It was expected that the number of contacts in the community to aid in "spreading the word" regarding the need for foster parents would increase by at least 500% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

Before implementation activities began, the agency had three community contacts or recruitment sources to help with recruiting foster parents. After implementation, there were thirty-two community contacts - an increase of over 1000%. Objective two to increase community contacts by at least 500% was met.

Objective 3) It was expected that the number of referrals of potential foster parents made by active foster parents would increase by at least 100% in the targeted treatment foster care program after implementation of the recruitment strategy.

In 1995, the agency received an average of one referral from active foster parents per month; to meet Objective three, a total of two foster parent referrals were needed each month. In the first and second month, no foster parent referrals were received. However, in the third month, one foster parent referral was

received. The objective to increase foster parent referrals by at least 100% was not met within the three month data collection period. The failure to meet objective three may be due to the sporadic nature of foster parent referrals and the inexperience of the foster parents at the time of the study.

Rosenau (1990) suggested getting the message out to the widest possible audience. The recruitment sources in this study that were most effective did just that. The utility bill inserts and the local newspapers, resources that reached large audiences, were the two most effective recruitment resources. Moore et al. (1988) and Smith and Gutheil (1988) also found mass media to bring about the greatest responses in their foster parent recruitment projects. James (1979) received a mixed response to mass media attempts at recruitment. She attributes her lack of success with mass media to the inability to get individual articles to materialize. This project resulted in four newspaper articles that appeared within the ten week implementation period.

The distribution of brochures and posters were the least effective recruitment methods. Knopinski (1985) in her recruitment project, also showed printed matter to be of little benefit to recruitment (as cited in Moore, Grandpre, & Scoll, 1988).

One large area of discrepancy between other recruitment studies and this one is the results pertaining to foster parent referrals. Foster Parent referrals in this project were low. Other recruitment projects found the most successful recruitment source to be active foster parents (Friedman & Lardieri, 1980; Smith &

Gutheil, 1988; Garber, Patrick, & Casals as cited in Valluzzo, 1984). However, the active foster parents in the targeted agency for this project were less experienced than in the foster parents involved in the studies mentioned above.

## Chapter VI. Conclusion - Implications and Recommendations

The recruitment strategy implemented for this practicum project was successful in increasing the pool of potential foster parents. Recruitment contacts were also developed and, if maintained, will continue to aid in recruitment of foster parents. Except for printing costs, all but one of the recruitment resources were cost free. Recruitment efforts do not require large budgets when staff are given the time to pursue cost free resources. Unfortunately, agency staff lack the time to devote to recruiting. They resort to less time consuming but more expensive methods of recruitment such as newspaper advertisement. The last time the agency used paid newspaper advertising, the cost was $700 for a quarter page for one day. No inquiry calls were received from this advertisement. Although the agency saves money by not hiring a full-time recruiter, they lose money because staff do not have the time to pursue more cost effective resources.

### Implications

The most effective recruitment resources in this project included utility bill inserts, community newspapers, and social service professionals; all cost effective resources. Social service professionals was a source that has not been previously mentioned. This resource included community professionals familiar with the program and, when approached by people interested in treatment foster parenting, would refer those people to the agency. This resource involved mostly "word of mouth" recruitment.

The billboard was the only recruitment resource that involved some cost. The billboard advertiser, however, gave a significant discount because of the agency's non-profit status. Some problems may have impacted the effectiveness of the billboard as a recruitment source. First, the billboard was posted two weeks later than scheduled; shortly before implementation activities ended. Secondly, after the billboard had been posted only two weeks, the paper was damaged, making it unreadable. A request was made for the billboard to be repaired, but this request was not granted. The agency has taken steps to either obtain a refund for the cost of labor or have the billboard reposted at a later date; however, these issues were not rectified until well after the data collection period. Because of these problems, the use of billboard advertising as a recruitment resource may actually be more effective than these finding indicate.

Findings demonstrated some difficulty in meeting Objective three: increasing the number of referrals from active foster parents. Two interpretations may explain this difficulty. First, 1995 data from the targeted site showed that referrals from active foster parents were sporadic. In 1995, foster parents did not make any referrals in five out of twelve months in the year which affected the average. Thirty percent of the foster parent referrals in 1995 occurred in one month. Secondly, 60% of the foster parents active during this practicum project were new to the program. They may have been more concerned with implementing their training than with recruiting for the program. According to

Valluzzo (1984) "significant time to have integrated the values and practices of the agency as well as the gratifications and frustrations of fostering children becomes a necessary recruitment requisite" for active foster parents (p. 76). Thus, foster parents become more involved in recruitment as they become more experienced. The low recruitment rate from active foster parents may reflect their inexperience.

Sources in the literature claim that many potential foster parents think about fostering at least a year before making an inquiry (Coyne, 1986; Mayers-Pasztor & Burgess, 1982). Many people may have become interested in foster parenting due to the efforts of this project, but did not make an inquiry call during the data collection period. The full impact of this project may not be felt immediately; therefore, expected long term results are not reflected in these findings. Rosenau (1990), who headed a recruitment project for the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, made the same conclusion: "even if one of our efforts fails to find a foster parent now, it may plant the seed for later harvest" (p. 30). It is hoped that this project will have the same effect.

Shortcomings of this practicum project include time limitations and implementation activities occurring during a busy holiday season. Recruitment efforts may have been weakened due to recruitment activities conflict with a busy holiday season. Many potential recruitment resources were unable to help due to

their holiday agendas. People may have been hesitant to make inquiries due to their holiday obligations.

Many of the recruitment sources, such as the newspapers, took two to three months to respond to requests. Many requests made to potential recruitment resources were not granted until after the data collection period. These late successes resulted in inquiry calls received after the three month data collection period which are not reflected in the findings. A longer data collection period would have captured these successes. More time would have allowed exploration into the later stages of recruitment such as licensing, training, and retention. While this project increased the number of potential foster parents, it will be unknown how many of these inquiries actually become licensed and trained.

**Recommendations**

To increase recruitment from active foster parents, it is recommended that foster care professionals take steps to improve the status and image of foster parenting. Rosenau (1990) claims that foster parenting has a history of an image problem which has hindered successful recruitment. The intensive skill training and payment accompanied with treatment foster care helps to increase the status of foster parenting, but there is still much room for improvement. Having foster parents act as presenters and trainers for new recruits would serve to increase the professionalism of the foster parent role. Even a small gesture like providing foster parents with business cards can make a big difference in their

image as professionals. Foster parents must be regarded as professionals and respected members of the treatment team. The General Accounting Office (1989) suggests that a campaign to raise the public image of foster parenting "would provide needed national recognition of foster parents that might help recruiting and retention" (p. 18).

Foster parents will also become strong advocates and recruiters for the agency when they feel nurtured and supported. By incorporating family support principles into the foster care industry, this goal can be accomplished. One example of a family support principle that might be incorporated into the foster care system is a focus on foster parent's strengths rather than their weaknesses. Professionals who only focus on the weaknesses of the foster parents are doing nothing to strengthen and empower the foster family. A constant focus on foster parent weaknesses causes them to feel unappreciated and will result in retention problems. Dunst et al. (1994) claim it is a misconception that the correction of family weaknesses will strengthen family functioning. Clark et al. (1996) used a strengths based approach in their Fostering Individualized Assistance Program. They found the program to bring many benefits to high risk foster children such as lower rate of placement change, lower runaways, less incarceration, and an increase in permanent placements. A strengths based rather than a pathological or deficit approach is more likely to accomplish the aim of strengthening, nurturing, and supporting foster families. By incorporating the strengths based approach into the foster care

system, foster parents will be more likely to advocate and recruit for the agency. Retention problems may also be rectified by use of a strengths based approach.

It is recommended that foster care agencies take a closer look at the paperwork required of foster parents for application. Smith and Gutheil (1988) suggest that intake and application processes for foster parents discourage rather than encourage applicants to follow through with the intake process. What they found is that some agencies intake processes are so difficult that prospective parents drop out. Smith and Gutheil suggested "replacing the discouraging practices with encouraging ones" (p. 140). Eliminating repetitive paperwork at intake and beyond can also improve quality by freeing foster parents and staff to spend more time in direct contact with foster children. According to Missouri Governor John Ashcroft (1991), "communities must tailor service packages to fit family needs instead of bureaucratic structures" (as cited in Farrow, 1991, p. 268). A similar adjustment would benefit the foster care system in providing more effective treatment to foster children.

In order to ensure recruitment efforts are successful the following recommendations are offered. First, each agency should devise an organized and consistent recruitment plan. Moore (1994) suggests creating a comprehensive, realistic recruitment plan in writing, targeting specific recruitment sources, specifying staff accountability, and establishing deadlines for accomplishing specific tasks.

Secondly, it is recommended that agencies hire a full-time recruiter who will be responsible for recruitment alone. Moorehouse and Sterry (1994) recommend an adequate allocation of staff time to implement planned recruitment activities, such that they are not assumed as an expendable, add-on function" (p. 22). With budget limitations, however, hiring a full-time recruiter is often not possible. When recruitment responsibilities must be shared among staff with many other caseload obligations, a plan that divides recruitment responsibilities among staff can make recruitment easier to manage. Without an organized plan or accountability, recruitment will not be taken seriously. Separate responsibilities, such as gaining media exposure or giving presentations, can be divided among staff. Another possibility to allocate time for recruitment among staff with many other caseload duties is to reduce the caseload of one staff member, allowing him or her time to pursue recruitment activities.

Third, it is recommended that recruitment strategies be continuous and consistent. Time limited recruitment projects, such as this one, will not lead to continued success. According to Moorehouse and Sterry (1994), "recruitment should not be seen as a project or a campaign, but as a long-term commitment and ongoing endeavor" (p. 23). This project attempted to ensure continuity with recruitment activities by having a volunteer continue implementation after development of the strategy and plan. Unfortunately, the volunteer position was not filled.

Creating and implementing an organized recruitment plan is another alternative to ensure continuity of recruitment activities. With an organized plan, recruitment activities are more likely to be followed through with on a regular basis rather than sporadically. Without a plan, recruitment is given attention only when problems arise. If families think about foster parenting at least a year before making an inquiry, it is important to send consistent and continuous messages to encourage follow through with the inquiry.

In conclusion, this project demonstrates viable solutions to the foster parent recruitment problem. Foster parents can be found, even when the need outweighs the supply. If recruitment efforts are given priority by implementing a consistent and continuous recruitment plan, the problems associated with a lack of foster parents can be rectified. It is hoped that this project will contribute to solution strategies aimed at finding and keeping foster parents. Foster children will directly benefit from efforts to decrease foster home overcrowding by recruiting more foster homes. If agencies can significantly increase the pool of potential foster parents, they can be more selective in choosing "the best" candidates to ensure quality care in their foster homes. Quality is of utmost importance when the care of America's children, and America's future, is at stake.

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# Appendix A

## Calendar Plan of Implementation Activities

**Calendar Plan for Implementation Activities**

Week One:
* begin making telephone calls and personal visits to pursue new community contacts to participate in recruitment efforts by distributing flyers, putting announcements in community bulletins, including inserts in utility bills or paycheck envelopes, and discussing the possibility of presentations
* begin distributing flyers throughout the community
* contact local volunteer agencies to aid in filling the position of Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter
* write announcements to be printed in the agency newsletter for active foster parents describing the "finders fee," giving recognition to those foster parents who have made referrals, and announcing the agency will pay dues for active foster parents to join the local foster parent association

Week Two:
* continue pursuing new community contacts and follow through with those contacts offering to help
* write letters and telephone calls to local media editors to request media exposure and support for this cause
* print announcements in program newsletter sent to active foster parents
* continue distributing flyers throughout community

Week Three:
* continue pursuing new community contacts and follow through with those offering to help
* continue distributing flyers throughout the community
* begin planning presentations by identifying possible locations and audiences.
* contact active foster parents to find individuals to attend presentations

* pursue filling the position of Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter by following up with contacts at volunteer agencies

Week Four:
* arrange for advertisement to be placed in local newspaper. Arrange payment and content of ad
* continue pursuing new community contacts and follow through with those offering to help
* continue distributing flyers through the community
* fill position of Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter
* review documentation in the recruitment manual

Week Five:
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)
* pursue new community contacts and follow through with those offering to help
* continue distributing flyers through the community
* begin training for Volunteer Foster Parent Recruiter

Week Six:
* pursue new community contacts and follow through with those offering to help
* continue distributing flyers throughout the community
* volunteer to begin active participation in recruitment activities with guidance of author
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)

Week Seven:
* pursue new community contacts and follow through with those offering to help
* continue distributing flyers throughout the community
* volunteer to continue recruitment activities with guidance of author
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)

Week Eight:
* follow through with community contacts offering to help
* continue distributing flyers throughout the community
* volunteer to begin recruitment activities on their own and reporting progress to author weekly
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)

Week Nine:
* follow through with community contacts offering to help
* volunteer to continue recruitment activities and report progress to author weekly
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)
* begin to review most/least effective strategies by reviewing Inquiry Contact Sheets - source of referral
* begin to review most/least helpful community contacts by reviewing documentation in recruitment manual
* begin writing thank you letters to new community contacts and other individuals who put effort into project

Week Ten:
* hold presentations (between weeks 5 and 10)
* final gathering of data for analysis
* complete thank you letters

# Appendix B

## Example of Flyer Used

# Families Building Families

We do things differently at the [redacted] Treatment Foster Care Program. We have to. Our kids need more. They need more time, they need more patience . . . they need more help.

We're looking for married couples to give kids, ages 2-18, a home. People with a professional attitude who realize some kids need more than just love. It also takes tenacity, toughness and time.

Because our kids need more, we give our foster parents more. We provide more training, more money and more help. You'll receive up to 40 hours of specialized training, and once a child joins your family, we provide 24-hour "on call" help.

[redacted] Foster Parents receive a monthly fee for their professional parenting skills as well as expenses to cover the child's basic needs. We give our people more because we expect more from them . . . and because our kids need more.

Foster Family Services

[redacted]

Delray Beach, Florida 33483

(561) 243-6999

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Appendix C

Billboard

# Thought about it long enough? Become a treatment foster parent now!

## contact:

AGENCY NAME

*Caring for America's Girls and Boys*

AGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBER

## Appendix D

## Insert for Utility Bills/Paycheck Envelopes

Thought About It Long Enough?
Become a Treatment Foster Parent Now!
Every child deserves a family. We are looking for people to give boys and girls, ages 2-18, a home. People with a professional attitude who realize some kids need more than just love provides all the training and support you will need to make a positive impact in a child's life.
Cal of South Florida
(561) 243
USA
Caring for America's Girls and Boys
John ad.9/96.pm5
3
9/4/96, 11:29 AM



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## Appendix E

## Inquiry Contact Sheet

--------- of SOUTH FLORIDA TREATMENT FOSTER FAMILY SERVICES

INITIAL CONTACT FORM

**FILL OUT THIS FORM COMPLETELY**

Date:_____ Contact Person:_____

Circle Mode of Contact:

A. Interested Person called
B. Agency contacted potential parent
C. Other:_____

**Full Name of interested Parties:**

Primary Parent:_____

Spouse/Backup Parent:_____

Mailing Address:_____

_____County:_____

Home Phone:_____

Primary Parent Business:_____

Backup Parent Business:_____

How did you hear about our Treatment Foster Family Services?

_____

Social Status: Married ____ Single ____ Divorced ____

Place of Employment - Primary Parent:_____

Spouse/Backup Parent:_____

Gender and Age of Biological Children at Home:_____

_____

Are you or have you ever been a licensed foster parent?_____

Agency:_____

Contact Person:_____

Additional Comments:_____

_____

Orientation invited to (season/yr):_____

Appendix F

Community Contact Sheet

THIS SHEET IS TO BE USED TO DOCUMENT COMMUNITY CONTACTS ONLY

**TREATMENT FOSTER FAMILY SERVICES**
**COMMUNITY CONTACT SHEET**

Name:_____ Date:_____

Site: South Florida Phone:_____ They called us: ____

Reason for Contact:_____ We called them: ____

Length of Contact: _____ File:_____

Staff completing form:_____ cc:_____

---

# Appendix G

## Sample Press Release

**Agency Letterhead**

NEWS RELEASE
Contact ---------
of South Florida
(561) 243-6999

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--------- **of South Florida Seeks Treatment Foster Parents To Make a Difference in the Lives of Area Boys and Girls**

**For Immediate Release**

Delray Beach, Florida -- ------ of South Florida is expanding its Treatment Foster Family Services in Palm Beach County and is actively seeking foster parents.

In 1995, the organization, which is a division of the world famous ---------- in Nebraska, provided treatment and care to 22 children through this program. Agency foster parents receive 50 hours of training, regular consultation, and 24-hour, on-call support. They also receive a monthly reimbursement for the child's basic needs, plus an additional stipend for their added time and effort.

There are more than 500 children placed in foster care in Palm Beach County, with the numbers of children needing services steadily increasing. Agency efforts to recruit quality foster parents will help more of these children find loving homes, and will ease the strain on an already overwhelmed foster care system. The agency accepts children with problems that require more specialized care than they would receive in traditional foster homes.

For example, 11-year-old "Nicholas" was placed with Doug ... Marguerite, Agency foster parents. Nicholas came to their home with severe behavioral problems which stem from a history of abuse in his biological family. When Nicholas entered Doug and Marguerite's home, he was argumentative, physically abusive, did not follow directions, lied, stole, and made suicidal threats.

In spite of Nicholas's problematic behaviors, Doug and Marguerite stick with him and provided the love, structure, and

- more -

consistent discipline he had been missing.

In one year, Nicholas's behaviors have dramatically improved. His aggressive outbursts have decreased, and he is more productive in school. He recently received an award in school honoring him for improving his grades.

The fight for Nicholas is not yet over. However, with treatment foster parents like Doug and Marguerite, Nicholas has a good chance of becoming a productive citizen when he reaches adulthood.

In addition to its Treatment Foster Family Services program, The agency provides in-home crisis counseling to 110 children and 44 families through its Family Preservation Program. Nationally, Boys Town, through it's programs in 16 cities across the country, provided treatment and care to more than 27,000 children.

If you are interested in becoming a ------- Treatment Foster Parent, call --------- of South Florida at (561) 243-6999.